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Economic Survey 2015-16 highlights need for more investment in Human Capital, expresses concern at declining educational outcomes, emphasizes importance of improving efficiency in delivery of services in the health sector.

The Economic Survey 2015-16, presented in the Parliament today by the Union Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley, states that the social infrastructure scenario in the country reflects gaps in access to education, health and housing amenities. Inclusive growth in India requires bridging gaps in educational outcomes and improved health attainments across the population.

As India capitalizes on the 'demographic dividend,' Economic Survey 2015-16 states that increasing investment in human capital is a key requirement to improve productivity of the population says the Economic Survey. The Economic Survey 2015-16 states that the total expenditure on Social Services including Education, Health, Social Security, Nutrition, Welfare of SC/ST/OBC etc. during 2014-15 (RE) was 7 % of GDP while it was 6.5% during 2013-14.

On the education front, the declining educational outcomes reflected in lower reading levels in both public and private sector schools are areas of concern. According to Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2014, there is sharp decline between 2007 to 2014 in the number of children in Standard V who can read a textbook of Standard II, in both government and private schools.

Economic Survey 2015-16 states that the Gender Parity Index (2013-14 Provisional) however, shows an improvement in girls' education, with parity having been achieved between girls and boys at almost all levels of education. The Government has taken several steps to provide education to underprivileged, vulnerable and marginalized people such as SCs, STs, other Backward Classes (OBC) including Minorities and other Economically Backward Classes through various programmes of education. 'Digital Gender Atlas for Advancing Girl's Education in India' was launched last year to help identify low-performing geographic pockets for girls, particularly from marginalized groups. A number of scholarship schemes to encourage enrolment and learning levels among different groups are in operation. National Scholarship Portal, a single window system for various types of scholarship schemes administered by different Ministries/Departments has been introduced under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode. During 2015-16, about 90 lakh Minority students are to be benefited under the Pre-matric, Post-matric and Merit-cum-Means scholarship schemes, while about 23.21 lakh SC students benefited under Pre-matric, 56.30 lakh under Post-matric and 3354 under the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship including the Top Class Education scholarship scheme are to be assisted.

Another aspect of human capital is the health attainments of the population. The expenditure on health as a percentage of total expenditure on social services increased from 18.6% in 2013-14 to 19.3% in 2014-15 (RE) and 19.5% in 2015-16 (BE).

The Economic Survey reports that the 'under five mortality' has declined from 126 in 1990 to 49 in 2013. As per NFHS-4, the percentage of children fully immunized in the age group (12-23 months) is above 80 per cent in Sikkim and West Bengal. All the 12 states surveyed have more than 50 per cent children fully immunized. Similarly under Mission Indradhanush, 352 districts of the country have been covered with 20.8 lakh children and 5.8 lakh pregnant women immunized in the first phase. 17.2 lakh children and 5.1 lakh pregnant women have been immunized in the second phase and 17 lakh children and 4.8 lakh pregnant women immunized in the third phase of the Mission Indradhanush.

Besides continuing support to existing interventions, initiatives such as Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) and Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram' (RKSK) have been launched in 2013 and 2014 respectively under the NHM to provide comprehensive health care. Considering the rising incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCSs), the Government of India has initiated an integrated National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancers, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) jointly by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy) on pilot basis in six districts.

Economic Survey 2015-16 states that the immunization coverage of children, health of pregnant women, declining role of public health delivery systems and the lack of adequate skilled personnel are the main challenges in the health sector at present. Health and access to sanitation/housing amenities are closely related issues which can improve the productivity and living environment of the population to a great extent. There are persistent regional disparities in access to housing and sanitation facilities with some States lagging behind with less than 25 per cent coverage in sanitation facilities.

The Way Forward

The Economic Survey 2015-16 points out the need to focus on the quality of education in both the public and private sectors. There is need for professionally qualified and trained teachers to improve educational outcomes. To strengthen the delivery of public health services and infrastructure facilities, both public investments and leveraging of private investments are necessary. The adoption of technology platforms and innovative models by leveraging Jan-Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) scheme can improve the efficiency in delivery of services.

DSM/NB/ES/RS/